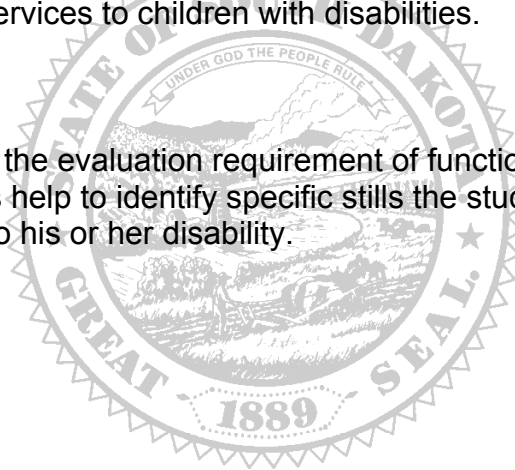


Functional Assessment for Special Education

**SD Office of Special Education
February 5, 2002**

This document is intended to provide technical assistance to school districts and/or agencies within the State of South Dakota that provide special education or special education and related services to children with disabilities.

This document explains the evaluation requirement of functional assessment. Functional assessments help to identify specific skills the student can and cannot perform in relationship to his or her disability.



Functional Assessment

When the Individuals with Disabilities Act was reauthorized in 1997, lawmakers received many comments regarding changes and/or clarification that was desired in the current law. One of the areas that received comments was that of evaluation procedures. There were requests that the regulation be revised to clarify that tests and other materials used in evaluating each child must include a full range of diagnostic techniques, including observations and interview. Some commenters requested that the regulation be revised to require that public agencies collect information regarding a child's learning style(s) and needed methodologies as part of an evaluation, because such information is critical in formulating appropriate instructional methods to promote the child's learning. Other commenters addressed the validity of tests used, etc.

These comments and much discussion finally led the Senate to state that "A public agency must ensure that: the IEP team for each child with a disability has all of the evaluation information it needs to make required decisions regarding the educational program of the child, including the consideration of special factors." The resulting language regarding functional assessment in the federal regulations has been highlighted within the applicable Administrative Rule of South Dakota below.

Legal citation

24:05:25:04. Evaluation procedures. School districts shall ensure, at a minimum, that evaluation procedures include the following:

(1) Tests and other evaluation materials are provided and administered in the child's native language or by another mode of communication that the child understands, unless it is clearly not feasible to do so. Any standardized tests that are given to a child:

(a) Have been validated for the specific purpose for which they are used; and

(b) Are administered by trained and knowledgeable personnel in conformance with the instructions provided by their producer;

(2) Tests and other evaluation materials include those tailored to assess specific areas of educational need and not merely those which are designed to provide a single general intelligence quotient;

(3) Tests are selected and administered so as best to ensure that a test administered to a child with impaired sensory, manual, or speaking skills accurately reflects the child's aptitude or achievement level or whatever other factors the test purports to measure, rather than the child's impaired sensory, manual, or speaking skills except where those skills are the factors which the test purports to measure;

(4) No single procedure is used as the sole criterion for determining eligibility or an appropriate educational program for a child;

(5) A variety of assessment tools and strategies are used to gather relevant functional and development information about the child, including information provided by the parents, that may assist in determining:

(a) Whether the child is a child with a disability; and

(b) The content of the child's IEP, including information related to enabling the child:

(i) To be involved in and progress in the general curriculum; or

(ii) For a preschool child, to participate in appropriate activities;

(6) Technically sound instruments, assessment tools, and strategies are used that:

(a) May assess the relative contribution of cognitive and behavioral factors, in addition to physical or developmental factors; and

(b) Provide relevant information that directly assists persons in determining the educational needs of the child;

(7) The child is assessed in all areas related to the suspected disability, including, as applicable, health, vision, hearing, social and emotional status, general intelligence, academic performance, communicative status, and motor abilities;

(8) The evaluation is sufficiently comprehensive to identify all of the child's special education and related services needs, whether or not commonly linked to the disability category in which the child has been classified;

(9) Materials and procedures used to assess a child with limited English proficiency are selected and administered to ensure that they measure the extent to which the child has a disability and needs special education, rather than measuring the child's English language skills; and

(10) If an assessment is not conducted under standard conditions, a description of the extent to which it varied from standard conditions (e.g., the qualifications of the person administering the test, or the method of test administration) must be included in the evaluation report.

Definition

Functional assessment is a “step beyond” standardized testing to determine the educational strengths and needs of the student to progress in the general curriculum. Functional assessments help to identify specific skills the student can and cannot perform in relationship to his or her disability.

Functional assessments also provide diagnostic information about what the student can actually do in the areas of concern. For example, if the student has a qualifying score in reading, and that is the area of concern, what is it the student can and cannot do when reading? Does the student have phonetic or sight word skills? Can the student read words in context? Can the student answer questions about a passage he or she has just read? Data is “functional” if it is skill based and identifies the student's present levels of performance to determine where to begin instruction with the student.

Functional assessments:

- Must be completed during the 25 –day evaluation period;
- May include some standardized tests that are diagnostic in nature (i.e. Key Math, Woodcock Reading Mastery Test), teacher observations of the student's skills, work samples (summarized and completed during the evaluation period), informal instruments, skill checklists, baseline data, post-tests, parent reports, etc.
- Are utilized to identify the student's present levels of education performance, annual goals and short-term objectives or benchmarks.

Process

When a student is evaluated for eligibility/special education instructional needs, the following steps apply:

1. Parental input must be gathered prior to beginning the evaluation process. Due to the individual concerns gathered about the student, the district staff, or evaluation team, may propose certain areas of needed evaluation and add to as necessary.
2. Standardized evaluations are administered to the student in order to determine eligibility.
3. Functional assessments are administered to the student in the areas of concern to determine actual instructional needs of the student.

4. If the student is an eligible student, an IEP is written.
The individual education program (IEP) is based upon the student's present levels of performance in the areas that are affected by the disability.
5. The present levels of performance statement for each student must reflect information gathered during the process of assessment. The functional assessment that was administered to the student should form the basis for this statement.

Documenting and using functional assessment

Functional assessment results or summaries must be in a format that can be shared with parents and be included in the IEP. For example, the special educator in one district may write up a report that details both the standardized achievement assessments given as well as the functional assessment that was administered to the student. Other districts may choose to have the psychologist include all of the ability testing, standardized achievement testing, and the functional assessment into one consolidated report. One option is to summarize the functional assessment on a separate form made by the district. Another option is to copy a work sample to share with the parents and include in the IEP.

Functional assessment results or summaries are then incorporated into the student's present levels of performance statement within the IEP, with annual goals and short-term objectives/benchmarks developed based upon the student's present levels of performance.

Possible tools to be used for functional assessment:

*This is not an exhaustive list, but are offered as suggestions.

Published diagnostic tests:**Publisher Information**

Brigance:	Inventory of Early Development Diagnostic Inventory of Basic Skills Diagnostic Inventory of Essential Skills Employability Skills Inventory Life Skills Inventory	Curriculum Associates, Inc. 5 Esquire Road, PO Box 2001 North Billerica, MA 01862-0901 1-800-225-0248
Spache Diagnostic Reading Scales		CTB MacMillan/McGraw-Hill
Qualitative Reading Inventory		Scott, Foresman and Company
Key Math		American Guidance Service
Woodcock Reading Mastery Test-R		American Guidance Service
Reading Skills Competencies Test		Barbe, Allen, and Sparkman
Reading and Study Skill Mastery Activities—Secondary		Barbe, Allen and Lezesque
Informal Test for Diagnosing Specific Reading Problems		Steven Pazlak
Six Traits of Writing—Northwest Educational Laboratories		Department of Education and Cultural Affairs

Standardized subtests that are not used during the evaluation to determine eligibility (e.g., K-TEA/DAB-2/DATA-2 Math Reasoning, Word Recognition/Decoding, Spelling) and Keymath-R subtests

NOTE: Information about published diagnostic assessments can be found on the web, or in test resource guides, such as Special Educators Complete Guide to 109 Diagnostic Tests by Roger Pierangelo, Ph. D. and George Geuliani, Psy. D.

Sight word lists:

Fry Instant Sight Word List
Dolch Sight Word List
Fitzgerald Read and Write Word List

Classroom assessments, teacher made tests:

Curriculum based assessment (phonics tests, reading chapter tests, math and writing skills compared to classmates)
Cartoons/Newspaper Articles (reading & comprehension skills [recalling facts/making inferences])
Story starters (for writing skills)
Spellmaster
Work samples collected and summarized during evaluation period
Flash cards

Math Mad Minute computations

Selected reading samples—Using a science/social studies textbook and having the student read orally from a selection presented earlier in the year

Speech and Language samples

Occupational/Physical Therapist's observation in classroom, PE and unstructured settings (playtime/recess, lunchroom)

Writing samples

Timed oral reading sample

Speech/language sample

Behavior assessments:

On-task classroom monitoring checklist

Behavior Evaluation Scale (completed by the teacher)

Behavior checklists

Adaptive behavior checklists

Transition assessments

Transition checklists—informal questionnaires given to the student

Situational assessment—take a student on the job to find out what he or she can or cannot do

Supported employment functional assessment

Community Based Vocational Exploration

Functional Skills Inventory

****All of the above activities can be found in the Got Life manual that is included in the Transition Tackle Box that was disseminated August of 2001.**